

OUT of Hand... Out of Mind

A humorous look at bridge



Bill Buttle

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To Jonathan and Andrew
Who've had to put up with my humor all their lives

THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN

Having reached the stage in life where there's more to see in the rear view mirror than out the windshield, it's obvious that there were many points along the way where a seemingly innocuous decision had life-altering effects. One such, for me, was the night in the final weeks of my first year at university that I began learning the game of bridge.

Exam time was always fraught with tension, and in the days leading up to and during the finals, a pick-up bridge game went on pretty much 24/7 in the common room of our residence. Bleary-eyed and dishevelled students gravitated to it at all hours of the day and night when further knowledge could not be absorbed without some sort of break, and it undoubtedly saved some from wandering into their exams drooling and gibbering nonsense. By the same token, it doomed others to a failed semester, redeemed only slightly by the acquisition of a wolfish proficiency at the bridge table. I fell somewhere in between the two extremes, and for many years played clumsy but enthusiastic kitchen bridge, usually in a party setting that did little to enhance the acuity of the participants.

It was not until middle age that I encountered duplicate bridge, and the scales fell from my eyes. Here was a pastime of a complexity that would intrigue the most jaded grey cells, peopled by mostly agreeable souls; a game whose attraction grew as familiarity increased. I quickly realized that nobody ever gains total mastery of its intricacies, and therefore the fascination never stops. Beyond the basic mechanical play, those who hope to be truly proficient must learn interpersonal skills in order to get the best out of their partner (a state of affairs not always in evidence at the table). Logic is essential to good bridge, as is a decent memory and an ability to assess probabilities and odds, to say nothing of the possession of a

certain low cunning. All these are attributes to be cultivated by the aspiring duplicate player, and all take time to develop.

Such has been the attraction of duplicate bridge that my wife and favorite bridge partner, Linda, and I find that a large proportion of our friends now tend to be duplicate players, and we feel that the encroaching limitations of aging have a little less impact on our bridge playing than on other activities we attempt. Our world increasingly revolves around the bridge table, and that seems no bad thing.

When I began to get serious about cartooning, I felt that the triumphs and tensions of competitive bridge were made for cartoon commentary, and 'Out of Hand' was born, appearing initially in black and white in the ACBL *Bulletin* twenty-some years ago. Many people assume that it outlines Linda's and my playing experiences, but this really is not the case. The situations I depict are mainly imaginary, and although some have had their beginnings in real life, not many of those actually occurred at our table. In any event, if I were using ourselves as templates, surely I would have come up with better-looking protagonists!

During the years I have been drawing, the arrival of the personal computer has had a terrific impact on the technique of producing cartoons. The process has, for me, undergone a total revolution, with the bulk of my drawing now being done right in the PC using a graphic pad and stylus, and only the barest of outlines is drawn on artboard or paper to be scanned into it. One consequence of this is that it's just as easy to produce in color as not, so several years ago we made the switch to color in the *Bulletin*, and here is the first all-color collection of cartoons, *Out of Hand, Out of Mind*.

I hope you get as much enjoyment out of reading them as I did drawing them!

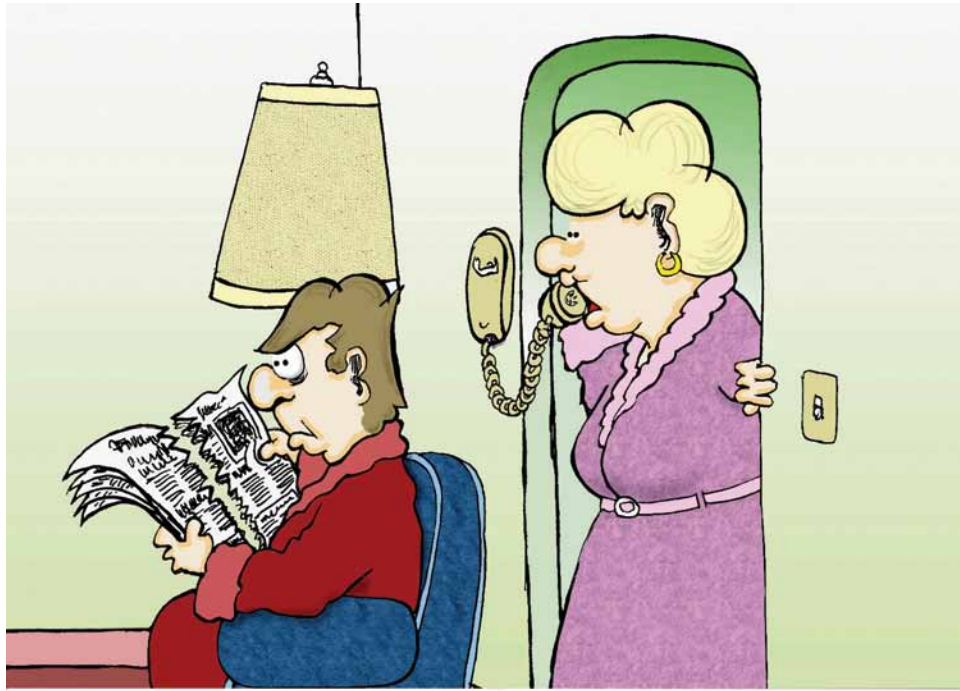
Bill Buttle



“ So!.....d'ja win? ”



“ I don't think Mother liked your 2 Heart bid ! ”



“ Why, yes, Mother! - we’d be delighted to play with you and Mr. Vaigley in the Sunset Manor Swiss team event ! ”



“ Once you’ve made your jump bid, your partner will indicate with his response whether he feels jumping is appropriate.”

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BILL BUTTLE (Canada) contributes monthly 'Out of Hand' cartoons to the ACBL's *Bulletin*.

He has illustrated the recent series of books by Victor Mollo, and *Why You Still Lose at Bridge* by Julian Pottage, both for Master Point Press. His previous collection of cartoons, *Out of Hand and Off the Fairway*, featured bridge and golf as its subjects.

